

15 What Is Israel's Place in God's Purpose?¹

As the adopted offspring of Abraham and Sarah, Christians stand in perennial need of a theological understanding of the Jewish people, who are Abraham and Sarah's physical descendants but do not recognize Jesus. Present generations stand in particular historical need of such a theological understanding of the Jewish people's place in the world because of the events of the past century, especially the exponential growth of the Jewish community in Palestine, the cataclysm of the Holocaust, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people, all these events being in part attributable to the action or indifference of European powers and the U.S.A. Yet precisely because of these events, an understanding that does justice to the complex exegetical, historical, political, theological, and moral issues is more difficult than it has ever been. Grief and anger at the suffering Zionism has brought to the Palestinian people, and joy and wonder at God's ancient people finding a home for itself again in its promised land, stand in strong tension. But both are biblical responses to events.

My own attempt to do justice to such tensions is structured around four polemical theses.

1 The Jewish People is Still God's People, but it is Destined to Come to Recognize Jesus

Is it really the case that the Jewish people has a special theological significance such as does not attach to the Chinese, the British, the Arabs, or the U.S.A.?² Many nations bolster their self-esteem by reckoning God attaches special significance to them.

Christians, at least, can hardly view the idea of God attaching special significance to the Jewish people as a myth. The New Testament presents Jesus to us as a Jew whose story continues and brings to a climax the history of God's purpose with Israel and who can only be understood in connection with that story. Further, finding we hear God's word out of Jewish scriptures (the New Testament being a Jewish book as essentially as the First Testament is), writings that emerged from the life and history of the Jewish people, carries implications regarding the specialness of the Jewish people in the purpose of God.

But if the Jews were once of special significance in God's purpose, are they still so? Jesus spoke of his fellow-Jews killing the vineyard-owner's son and having the kingdom of God taken away from them to be given to others (Matt 21:43), and Paul can speak of his fellow-Jews in very negative terms (Phil 3:2; 1 Thess 2:15-16). In line with this, the New Testament applies to the church many First Testament designations of Israel (e.g., 1 Pet 2:9-10). Those who belong to Christ are the offspring of Abraham; they are the real circumcision (Gal 3:29; Phil 3:3). Has the church taken over the position

¹ This chapter combines material first published in "The Christian Church and Israel," *Theological Renewal* 23 (1983): 4-19; "The Jews, the Land, and the Kingdom," *Anvil* 4 (1987): 9-22, "Modern Israel and Biblical Prophecy," *Third Way* 6/4 (1983): 6-8; and "Palestine and the Prophets," *Third Way* 2/7 (1978): 3-6.

² On this question, see further chapter 16 below, §1.

Israel lost because of its failure to respond to Jesus? Ephesians describes the people of God as now a single new humanity in which the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been abolished (Eph 2:15). It often seems to Jews that Christians describe the superiority of their Christian faith in such a way as to encourage anti-Semitism; phrases such as "the Jews crucified Christ" especially have this effect. Has God given up any special relationship with the Jewish people, in response to its final turning away expressed in its spurning of its Messiah?

This is apparently not so, to judge from the way the story continues after Jesus' crucifixion. Acts emphasizes that the Jews are the first to be invited to renew their place in the kingdom, and that very many of them respond.³ The terrible "prayer," "his blood be on us," has found its adequate counter-prayer in Jesus' "Father, forgive them."⁴ Jesus' warnings, taken up by Paul, need to be understood by analogy with those of the prophets, whose warnings that their contemporaries were in imminent danger of forfeiting their destiny (and who did so) did not mean that the ultimate destiny of that people to which God had made a commitment in Abraham was endangered. This is not surprising. God had, after all, made a pledge to a permanent covenant with Israel. As is the case in the First Testament, Jesus' word of judgment that sounds so final is followed by the undeserved word of grace. The Israel of any particular generation (like the church of any generation) can be threatened with rejection and can actually be cast off. But God will still keep a commitment to the seed of Jacob as an entity. Israel is still the people of God, even though no longer its sole embodiment, and even though its rejection of Jesus puts it largely into a state of suspended animation. And therefore it will come to acknowledge Jesus. This is not so much a prediction as a promise that God will keep issuing the invitation to it to respond as God's elect should, until it does so.

Paul himself notes that there are severe theological and spiritual difficulties about the idea that God could terminate commitment to Israel, even in response to acts on Israel's part that could quite justify such a response. This is expressed in the New Testament's most systematic attempt to theologize about the Jewish people, in Rom 9 - 11.

These chapters form no digression extrinsic to the main argument of Romans. They constitute a climax within it, perhaps even *the* climax.⁵ The question of Israel's destiny first appears near the opening of the letter, but it is set aside as Paul attempts to establish that his gospel of salvation by faith is a good Jewish gospel. He does so by showing it corresponds to Abraham's experience, that its effects parallel the effects of Adam's sin, and that it leads to the fulfilling rather than the frustrating of the law's essential purpose (Rom 4 - 8). But he also has to establish the logic of his claim that Israel's unfaithfulness and turning away from the gospel do not nullify God's faithfulness (so Rom 3:3-4), since this possibility constitutes another powerful objection to his gospel. He thus points out that God's faithfulness

³ See Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), pp. 44-46.

⁴ D. Pawson, *The Church, Britain, the World and Israel* (taped address; Bromley: Prayer for Israel, ?1981).

⁵ So K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), p. 4.

has ensured that a remnant of the Jewish people has responded, which was often all that happened in First Testament times (Rom 9:6-29); that responsibility for not responding rests with the Jewish people itself, since it has had opportunity to do so (Rom 9:30 - 10.21); but that after its failure has found positive fruit in leading to a concentration on mission to the Gentiles, it will be restored (Rom 11:1-32). "And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). Presumably this will come about by the same means as the salvation of the Gentiles, by the Spirit opening Israel's eyes to the significance of Jesus (there are not two ways of salvation). But Paul is silent on that; perhaps he has told us all he felt clear about. He has shown that his gospel is Jewish and biblical. It establishes the Jewish people's vocation as the people of God in a new and undreamed-of way, rather than annulling it. It is still God's people, and God still intends to save it.

John Calvin took the view that when Paul declares, "all Israel will be saved," "Israel" refers not to the Jewish people but to the "new Israel," the church.⁶ If we understand this to denote the church as opposed to Israel, the context of the statement undermines this interpretation. It would take Paul's whole argument to a limp conclusion. This argument at least requires that the Jewish people be included in this "Israel" (as Calvin, indeed, assumed); otherwise Paul's demonstration of God's faithfulness to it collapses. Further, "Israel" appears ten times elsewhere in these chapters, and each time refers to the Jewish people; there is no indication that it has a different sense in Rom 11:26. There is, actually, no point in the New Testament where "Israel" denotes the church. Although the New Testament uses terms to describe the church that the First Testament uses to describe Israel, it does not describe the church as "Israel" or the "new Israel" or the "true Israel." The transference of such terms from the Jewish people to the church begins with Justin Martyr, when the tension over the Jewish people's position that is maintained in the New Testament is lost and the church is distancing itself over against Judaism.⁷ In the New Testament, "Israel" means "Israel." The New Testament does not describe even Jesus as Israel, the true Israel, or the new Israel. The Jewish-gentile church comes to share in Israel's privileges and can be understood by means of images that the First Testament uses to describe Israel, but this does not in itself mean that the church has replaced Israel.

If "all Israel" refers to the Jewish people, does it denote the sum total of believing Israel throughout the generations,⁸ or rather the people as a whole turning to Christ at the End?⁹ The latter view brings into focus the important expectation that God's faithfulness will bring a large-scale acknowledgment of Jesus on the part of the Jewish people, the former avoids the danger of this vision becoming a piece of distant eschatology without

⁶ See *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), on the passage.

⁷ On this process, see P. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (London/New York: CUP, 1969); his treatment of Gal 6:16 presents the most plausible understanding of the verse as - in keeping with Rom 9 - 11 seeking God's mercy on Israel as well as on believers in Christ.

⁸ So, e.g., W. Hendriksen, *Israel and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968).

⁹ So, e.g., C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans Volume II* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1979), on the passage.

direct application to the present. In any case we must see Paul's argument and hope in the context of his own ministry and experience;¹⁰ in this context, there might be little difference between these two alternatives. Paul hoped that he himself would see the gentile world, and thus the Jewish people, too, turn to Jesus. It was this hope that energized his ministry, as happened again when this understanding of Paul was recovered by the Puritans.¹¹

When one considers how to relate the two perspectives within the New Testament, Israel's rejection and its security, Rom 9 - 11 provides the most comprehensive horizon for an understanding: it embraces the theme of Israel's rejection, which is acknowledged but seen as ultimately subordinate to its acceptance. These chapters themselves show that the application to Gentiles of Hosea's "not-my-people" becoming "my people" (1 Pet 2:10) need not imply that the description "my people" is simply transferred to the church and no longer applies to the Jewish people. Paul quotes this passage from Hosea (see Rom 9:22-26) in the context of an argument that ultimately asserts that the Jewish people does still belong to God. The church comes to share its historic privileges and is described in terms that historically described it, but this does not imply that those descriptions no longer apply to the Jewish people. Gentiles come to be fellow-heirs with Jews, not replacements of them.

If the New Testament has a concept of a new Israel, while not using the expression, it is that body that comprises the Jewish people as a whole plus Gentiles who in Christ become adopted children of Abraham, a vision that corresponds to the one in Isa 2. As with the covenant, the new takes up and transforms the old, it does not set it aside; otherwise, God would hardly be faithful and self-consistent. The resistance of most Jews short-circuits the process of bringing the new Israel into being and makes this new Israel still the object of faith and hope; the largely gentile church with a vacuum at its center can hardly comprise the ultimate new Israel. Meanwhile, the true Israel includes gentile believers by adoption, but it explicitly comprises the remnant of Jews that does recognize Jesus (so Rom 2:28-29; 9:6).¹² At the same time, alongside the one new humanity of which Ephesians speaks, the original embodiment of God's covenant people continues to exist, as something of an anomaly indeed, pending its recognizing Jesus and finding its rightful place in that new humanity that is so truncated without it.

God's continuing commitment to the Jewish people does not imply they are "all right" without recognizing Jesus, that it does not matter if they do not acknowledge him. One way to put that view is to suggest that God has two covenants, a covenant with the Jews that goes back to Abraham, then one with Gentiles that depends on Jesus. But a universal significance attaches to Jesus, a significance for Jews as well as Gentiles. The idea that Jews are perfectly all right without acknowledging the Jewish Messiah seems an odd one, and can hardly be reconciled with the argument of Rom 9

¹⁰ See G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 346-52.

¹¹ See I. H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971), esp. p. 42.

¹² Cf. H. Berkhof, "Israel as a Theological Problem in the Christian Church," *JECs* 6 (1969): 329-347 (p. 335).

- 11, as some “two covenants” theologians recognize. Paul assumes that God’s commitment to Israel means it will indeed come to recognize Jesus; it does not mean it has no need to do so. In heaven I expect to meet Jews who have not recognized Jesus: not only Jews from First Testament times, but Jews who have lived since Jesus’ day, people who have perhaps been prevented from recognizing him by the church’s failure to reflect him. They will be there by God’s electing grace, as I will be, and they will be there because Jesus lived, died, and rose for them, as he did for me (even if it is only then that they recognize that this was so), and they will be there because they have put their trust in God and God’s grace, as I will be (not because they have “done their best”; no one will be there on that basis). There is only one covenant. All God’s promises find their “Yes” in Christ (2 Cor 1:20).

If God is still committed to the Jewish people but they do need to come to recognize Jesus as their Messiah (and God promises that they will), what is their continuing theological significance? The fundamental point derives from the simple fact that they continue to exist. This has often been reckoned a powerful argument for believing in the existence of God; the argument has the more force after Hitler. Whether or not it should convince an agnostic of God’s existence, for the believer (Rom 9 – 11 implies) it certainly witnesses to the faithfulness of God, for it reflects the fact that God long ago made a commitment to them. If God had not kept this commitment, what grounds would one have for believing that God would keep any other commitments? Precisely by its continuing existence despite its resistance to the gospel, the Jewish people witnesses to the faithfulness of God, to the grace of God, to the fact that salvation stems from grace and is based on election and on God’s word of promise and not on human deserve, to the mercy of God that continues to love them despite their refusing to acknowledge Jesus, and to the power of God that continues to use them as God’s witnesses. At the same time, it witnesses to the sinfulness of humanity, to the judgment that sinfulness deserves, and to the particular sinfulness of the people of God. To the Jewish people belong the covenants and the promises; yet it refuses Jesus. How necessary, then, Jesus (and specifically as the suffering Messiah) was. The Jewish people’s failure and rejection warn the church against a false confidence in its relationship to God. If Israel could be given so much and fail, let those who think they stand take heed lest they fall.¹³

Once the church cut itself off from its Jewish roots, Israel came to have further theological significance for it. James Parkes summarizes the features of the Sinai revelation as the acceptance of a life that looks outward to the world because it looks upward to God, that is viewed as a unity because secular and religious are not divided, that involves life in community, and that is based on the law of God faithfully but boldly reinterpreted in each generation. The tragedy of a Christianity that has polarized over against Judaism (and embraced Hellenism instead) is that it has cut itself loose from its Jewish roots and thus developed unbiblically. H. Berkhof adds the Jewish people’s having to live with the hiddenness of God, its insistence that the world is not yet redeemed, and its calling nevertheless

¹³ On Rom 9 – 11 see further Karl Barth’s sustained theological exposition in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1957), pp. 195–305.

to live by God's faithfulness in an unredeemed world.¹⁴

The Jewish people still belongs to God and Jesus belonged to it; recognizing him is thus its privilege, responsibility, and calling. It still needs what the first sermons in Acts speak of: to find forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit by turning from waywardness and acknowledging the crucified one as the one whom God has made both Lord and Messiah. It needs this no more than Gentiles do (it is not uniquely sinful), but no less than they (even though it already belongs to the God who offers these gifts to it).

Indeed, its need to recognize Jesus is more pressing than it was in New Testament times. There is no adequate theology of the Holocaust, but there can be none except via thinking through the relationship of the crucifixion of the Jewish people and the crucifixion of Jesus. "If its faith in the faithfulness of God and in the integrity of his covenant is to survive, Israel cannot continue to hold apart the God in whom it believes and the enormity of its own suffering and hurt but must surely allow them to come together in the very heart of its trust in the living God. And how is that to come about except through the cross of Jesus Christ?"¹⁵

A Christian writer observes that "ultimately Romans 9 - 11 ends on a conversionist note that is unacceptable".¹⁶ That view is itself unacceptable. Yet two millennia of church history make it more difficult to express what it is a Christian thinks a Jew is called to. "Conversion" has a different meaning in our world from the one it had in Acts, and Romans does not refer to the "conversion" of the Jewish people. We cannot easily talk of a Jew "becoming a Christian" or "joining the church," because "church" stands over against "synagogue" and joining the church implies leaving the Jewish community, while "becoming a Christian" means "ceasing to be a Jew." This was not the case in the early years of Christianity, and one cannot necessarily fault Jews who come to believe in Jesus today for hesitating to use terms such as "Christian" and "church." Alternative terms such as "messianic assembly" are etymological equivalents, but they have not been subjected to centuries of reinterpretation that have given them essentially gentile connotations. Even the Jewish rite of baptism became the supreme sign of leaving the Jewish community and reneging on one's Jewish faith (perhaps at the command of the sword), so that one may sometimes hesitate today to hurry a Jewish believer into baptism. Jewish believers still have to fight to establish within Judaism and within the church the conviction that believing in Jesus is a Jewish thing to do, that it is not a denial of their Jewishness but makes them "completed Jews," not ex-Jews. There could in theory be some danger here of the emergence of a new Christian Judaism. The challenge to

¹⁴ J. W. Parkes, *Judaism and Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1948), pp. 27-28, summarized in J. T. Pawlikowski, "The Church and Judaism," *JECs* 6 (1969): 573-597 (pp. 588-589); cf. H. H. Harcourt, "Psychology, Reality and Zionism," *JECs* 7 (1970): 324-331 (p. 325); Berkhof, "Israel as a Theological Problem in the Christian Church," pp. 338, 346; also H. Küng and P. Lapide, "Is Jesus a Bond or Barrier," *JECs* 14 (1977): 466-483, on the Jewishness of Jesus.

¹⁵ T. F. Torrance, "The Divine Vocation and Destiny of Israel in World History," in D. W. Torrance (ed.), *The Witness of the Jews to God* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1982), pp. 85-104 (p. 95).

¹⁶ J. T. Pawlikowski, "The Contemporary Jewish-Christian Theological Dialogue Agenda," *JECs* 11 (1974): 599-616 (p. 602).

messianic Jews and to the church is for the church to let messianic Jews help it recover something of its Jewish heritage. The particular challenge in Israel is the continuing development of a believing community that embraces Jews and Arabs.

Further, one has to acknowledge that calling Jesus Messiah may require an even greater leap of faith today than it did in AD 35. The Messiah is, after all, the one who brings about the reign of peace and justice. Two millennia of history leave the world no more full of peace and justice than it was. It is difficult to claim that matters are better in areas where the Christian church is strong, and it is understandable that Jews who have experienced manifold Christian persecution, harassment, or neglect are especially skeptical when they are told that the Messiah came long ago. Indeed, should we cease claiming that Jesus was the Messiah? After all, recognition as *Messiah* seemed to be the last thing Jesus himself sought. At least we have to recognize that like calling him Lord, calling Jesus Messiah is a statement of our faith, hope, and commitment; it is not what can actually be seen.¹⁷ Yet we know that Jesus will fulfill the messianic dream because he *was* the one who lived, died, and rose from the dead for us. And that commitment continues to make its demand of Jews, too.

2 The Jewish People Still Has a Claim to a Homeland in Palestine

Reckoning that God has abandoned the Jewish people or never chose them will naturally bring in its train the conviction that a Jewish claim to land in Palestine (or anywhere else) and an attaching of theological and moral significance to the state of Israel should be considered on the same basis as would apply to any other people or state. "Two covenant theology," in contrast, as well as implying that Jewish evangelism is unnecessary and wrong, will naturally go along with a positive view of the relationship between Jews and the land and a positive view of the establishment of the state of Israel. People who reckon that God is still committed to the Jewish people but that they are destined to recognize Jesus are inclined to share that positive view.

In speaking of the theological entity "Israel," I have so far mostly referred to it as "the Jewish people" because "Israel" is also the name of the modern state. The Jewish people as a whole numbers some thirteen million, an average size for a modern people, perhaps, and a far larger size than it was in biblical times, despite crusade, inquisition, pogrom, Holocaust, and the running toll of assimilation. Nearly half of the thirteen million live in the United States. Nearly five million live in Israel. The rest are spread through Europe, South America, and elsewhere.¹⁸ Yet for the Jewish people and for Gentiles, the State of Israel has an importance out of all proportion to its numbers. Does it have a distinctive theological significance? What sort of

¹⁷ See J. Cott, "The Problem of Christian Messianism," *JEcS* 16 (1979): 496-514; Pawlikowski, "The Contemporary Jewish-Christian Theological Dialogue Agenda," pp. 603-605; C. Klein, "Catholics and Jews - Ten Years after Vatican II," *JEcS* 12 (1975): 471-484 (pp. 480-482); M. Hellwig, "Christian Theology and the Covenant of Israel," *JEcS* 7 (1970): 37-51 (pp. 49-50).

¹⁸ See <http://www.simpletoremember.com/vitals/world-jewish-population.htm>.

claim does Israel have to territory in the Middle East?

Israel can argue a claim to land in Palestine on historical, legal, and moral grounds. Jews have lived there for more than three thousand years. When Zionist pioneers began to increase the number of Jews in Palestine a century ago, they generally acquired land quite legally and/or reclaimed land that was uncultivated. Their achievement in making swamp, desert, and barren hillside bloom is remarkable. After the Second World War, they accepted the United Nations plan to partition Palestine. Their subsequent territorial gains have been won in wars that arguably were all defensive: in particular, East Jerusalem and the West Bank were occupied only after Jordan had initiated attacks on West Jerusalem in 1967. Israel's right to land and nationhood in Palestine is as secure as (for instance) the United States' right to New Mexico (or the rest of the territory the U.S.A. occupies) or Britain's to the Falklands.

Israel's claim to Palestine is buttressed, however, in the mind of many Christians and Jews by theological considerations parallel to those relating to the Jewish people's special theological significance. (I leave aside the question whether the U.S.A. occupies its land by some comparable divine election and gift.) God gave the land of Canaan to Israel, and a commitment to give Israel this land still stands. It goes back to God's original promise to Abraham, and it is thus intrinsic to the very beginning of God's commitment to Abraham's descendants (Gen 12:1-7; 15:1-21); it is not a relatively late theme like the promises concerning David and concerning the temple. It recurs in the account of God's second solemnizing of a covenant with Abraham, where possession of the land is to be as lasting as is the covenant itself (Gen 17:7-8; cf. Ps 105:7-11). There are various ways of understanding "all the land of Canaan" (Gen 17:8), but it is hard to think of it omitting what is now East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Does such a promise still hold after the coming of Christ, in whom all God's promises find their "yes" (2 Cor 1:20)? Hebrews 3 - 4 sees the "rest" that the land embodied, the inheritance it symbolized, as now enjoyed in Jesus (cf. 1 Pet 1:4). Has the literal promise of land had its day?¹⁹

Until the 1970s, Christian theological study of the First Testament paid little attention to the land of Israel and its theological significance. Indeed, examining how the theme of the land is handled provides one litmus test for evaluating a work on Old Testament theology.²⁰ If it fails to handle this theme, whatever the value of its treatment of other themes, the work as a whole cannot be expected to offer a guide to the First Testament's theological implications as a whole. The land is one of the handful of key themes in the First Testament; any claim to do justice to its theological concerns, any attempt to write "Old Testament theology," has to give this theme considerable prominence.

If the land is so prominent in the First Testament, why was it often

¹⁹ For discussion, see, e.g., W. Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977/London: SPCK, 1978); W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley/London: University of California, 1974); H.-R. Weber, "The Promise of the Land: Biblical Interpretation and the Present Situation in the Middle East," *SE/16* in *StudyEncounter* 7 (1971).

²⁰ For instance, Brevard S. Childs' *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM, 1985/Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) ignores it.

ignored by works on Old Testament theology? It has commonly been the case that their Christian faith has had a narrowing influence on Old Testament theological study undertaken by Christians. In the New Testament there is very little allusion to the theme of the land. The aspects of Israel's story to which it makes most appeal concern Israel's experience before becoming a landed people, and then God's promise to David. Abraham and the exodus, David and the temple, come into greater focus than Joshua and the entering of the land. Linked with this is the way the New Testament emphasizes salvation as an other-worldly matter. It urges Christians not to be attached to the things of this world. It even has Abraham seeking a better country than his earthly one, seeking a heavenly country (Heb 11:13-16). Matthew 5:5 does have Jesus affirming the promise that the meek will possess the land (Ps 37:11), but English translations assume that Jesus here destines his followers to inherit the world, presumably in a sense that coheres with the world focus that appears elsewhere in the New Testament. It asserts Jesus' lordship over the whole world and to spread the gospel through the whole world. This would naturally make it relatively uninterested theologically in the land of Israel in particular. When most Jews rejected the gospel, this encouraged the development of a worldwide perspective.

Judaism's rejection of the gospel also transformed expectations regarding how God's rule would be manifested in the world. The means of this manifestation turn out to be not Israel with Gentiles holding onto its coat sleeves, but a gentile Christian Church fulfilling what was supposed to be Israel's role. We have noted already, however, that the significance of this largely gentile Church could only be expounded by means of the stories and symbols of First Testament Israel (see, for instance, 1 Cor 10:1-13). It is in this connection that the land comes to be referred to in the New Testament. Where it appears as a theologically significant theme, it is usually as metaphor rather than as material reality. Jesus is the "inheritance" of the community of faith; it is in him that it finds its "rest"; the "blessing" that counts is the blessing in the heavenly places that it receives in Christ (1 Pet 1:4; Heb 3 - 4; Eph 1:3).

The New Testament's concern with land, with space, is thus broadened to embrace the world, narrowed to center on Jesus, and refocused to work via the largely gentile church. Theologically, the New Testament does not have room for the notion of sacred space (as it does not have room for other aspects of the sacred) or of a holy land, because of its emphasis on the whole world being God's and because Jesus takes the place of this central image in Judaism. This is partly because he takes the central place once occupied by the people of Israel, the notion of land being tied to that of people. "To be 'in Christ'... has replaced being 'in the land' as the ideal life"²¹ as Christ is also the locus of that rule of God that the First Testament associates with the land of Israel.

That would imply that the theme of the land itself is dispensable. Indeed, W. D. Davies has asked whether the theme is dispensable to Judaism.²² The promise, the covenant, and the law, after all, had their

²¹ Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, p. 217.

²² See his "Reflections on the Territorial Dimension of Judaism," in *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, (Philadelphia: Fortress/London: SPCK, 1984), pp. 49-71; his *The*

origins outside the land, and the experience of exile arguably affected the faith expressed in the First Testament more profoundly than the experience of the land itself did, as dispersion experience has decisively shaped Judaism. Judaism could survive without the land; it transcends the land. So how important is the land to Jews or to Christians? The other systematic Christian treatment of this theme from the 1970s is Walter Brueggemann's pioneering study (that seems the right image).²³ He attempts to maximize indications that the New Testament is concerned with this theme in the literal sense, but he is less convincing than Davies, who grants that in the New Testament land is not an overt interest.

In these two works, the scholars' exegetical study is surely affected by their theological agenda. While the land can indeed function for Jews as a metaphor for hope, I doubt whether Judaism can be de-territorialized, as Davies believes.²⁴ Neither is Brueggemann's attempt to territorialize the New Testament persuasive; further, for him the particularity of the land of *Israel* rather disappears. While he is aware of his study's significance for Jewish-Christian dialogue,²⁵ it is land as a theme for all peoples from which he starts and which the theme of land in the First Testament seems especially to suggest to him.

Brueggemann does, however, thus draw our attention to an important feature of the First Testament, its materialism. A faith based on the New Testament alone risks a false other-worldliness; this-worldly concerns are less prominent in the New Testament. Yet even the New Testament is concerned not to free people from living their lives in this world but to free them to live this life in light of the age to come. Further, New Testament faith itself bars the way to other-worldliness by its belief in incarnation, its conviction that in Jesus God himself becomes material reality. In this sense the First Testament's stress on the land is actually in keeping with the New Testament's beliefs about Jesus (or rather, vice versa), and the theme of the land is of importance to Christian theology partly because it affirms parallel theological convictions to those of the doctrine of the incarnation.

Indeed, if Jesus and Paul see God as still committed to Israel, they thereby imply a concern with the land of Israel. The notion of land is intrinsic to the notion of peoplehood; exceptions (the Jews, the Armenians, the Romany people) only prove the rule. The New Testament would surely have needed to make it explicit if it had not simply assumed that God's promise of land to Israel still held. Any people's identity is rooted in land (the metaphor of "roots" is a telling one). Secure possession of a home you can call your own is built into what it means to be a person, a family, or a nation. Unless people willingly renounce these for some reason, lacking them means lacking a fundamental element in what it means to be human. Possessing land is bound up with being a people. This is true for the Jews as

Territorial Dimension of Judaism Berkeley: University of California, 1982) is an expansion of this article.

²³ *The Land*.

²⁴ Contrast, for instance, A. Hertzberg's essay "Judaism and the Land of Israel," *Judaism* 19 (1970): 423-34 = J. Neusner (ed.), *Understanding Jewish Theology* (New York: Ktav, 1973), pp. 75-88.

²⁵ "Christians cannot speak seriously to Jews unless we acknowledge land to be the central agenda" (*The Land*, p. 190).

it is for any other people. Taking seriously God's commitment regarding the land is involved in taking seriously any divine commitment to Israel. It is an aspect of having a real, rather than a docetic, view of Israel.²⁶

The New Testament's silence on the theme of the land of Israel may thus simply imply that this theme should be taken for granted, not that it should be rejected. *Of course* the notion of Israel presupposes the notion of land, the dispersion notwithstanding. It is still to the physical Jerusalem that dispersion Jews pilgrimage (cf. Acts 2). Israel's independence is an issue the New Testament does touch on, because it is an issue of the day. Israel's landed-ness is an uncontroversial question. The New Testament makes it explicit that in Christ the temple and the sacrificial system lose their literal significance. If it had meant to suggest that this happens with the promise of the land, it would have had to make this explicit, too. But while it once or twice applies the rest/inheritance motif to Jesus, it never directly suggests that the First Testament promise regarding the land is fulfilled in him. We might infer that this promise is one to which God says "yes" in Jesus not in the sense that his coming fulfills it but in the sense that his coming confirms it, guarantees that like all other promises it will be fulfilled. It could naturally follow that the positive purpose of God lies behind the Jews regaining a home for themselves in Palestine. God's commitment to Israel had to find expression in seeing it has a home; otherwise it is not a commitment at all. The New Testament's concern with the being of the Jewish people cannot but imply a concern with the land of Israel.

Although we cannot interpret First Testament promises as if Christ had not yet come, this does not mean that the New Testament's reapplication of First Testament motifs decides the only meaning these motifs have. The New Testament's use of the First Testament generally has a specific concern with how the First Testament can be used to illumine the significance of the Christ event. It is not designed to interpret the First Testament in its own right, and how we do that has to be determined on broader grounds. It often spiritualizes First Testament references to this-worldly realities such as life, health, love, land, peace, and justice, because it is concerned to interpret Christ's significance for our inner relationship with God. But we have noted that even the New Testament is ultimately concerned not to free people from this life but to free them to live this life in light of the age to come. It thus leads us back to the this-worldly realities of life, health, love, land, peace, and justice that are the First Testament's direct concern.

If we are to be biblical people, the agenda for Christian theology, ethics, and preaching is to be set by the two Testaments jointly and not by the New alone. In other words, much depends on whether the First Testament has "revelatory significance" in its own right, and in what sense we have to read it in the light of the New.²⁷ In discussing the land, Brueggemann can give the impression that Christians' theological agenda is rightly set by the New Testament, so that if it is not concerned about the land, then biblical theology cannot be (though in many subsequent writings

²⁶ See Torrance, "The Divine Vocation and Destiny of Israel in World History," p. 103; H. Siegman, "A Decade of Catholic-Jewish Relations: A Re-Assessment," *JECs* 15 (1978): 243-60 (pp. 252-53).

²⁷ Weber, "The Promise of the Land," p. 11.

he makes clear that he does not make this assumption). The New Testament itself does not imply that it is itself an adequate guide for an understanding of Christian faith. Its own assumption is that the First Testament must contribute very significantly to the agenda for Christian theology, ethics, and preaching. Of course, when the first Christian writings came into being, the New Testament did not yet exist. The "First Testament" was the Bible for people of New Testament times. The New Testament presupposes an understanding of God and God's concerns that comes from the First Testament, and frequently refers the reader back to it as its own source of authoritative teaching. What the New Testament says is not a complete exposition of Christian faith. It assumes people also need the First Testament for that. So whatever we find in the First Testament has to be taken seriously theologically. If we find that the two Testaments take a different view (for instance, over the land, in the sense that the subject is not a focus in the New), we view their different perspectives as complementary; we do not look at one through the other and emasculate it.

Thus Christians have to take the materialism of the First Testament seriously. This will draw us not into a wholly materialistic and this-worldly faith, but into holding onto the conviction that God really is concerned with this world along with the conviction that God really is concerned with the new age and with the other world, with resurrection life, and with relationships with God. Both are present in both Testaments, but it is easy to simplify down the First Testament to the one and the New Testament to the other, to let the latter have theological priority over the former, and thereby to end up with an oversimplified and an unbiblical faith.

3 Commitment to the Jewish People Does Not Imply Commitment to the State of Israel

That the promise of the land stands is presupposed by the kind of Christian attitude to the question of Israel and the land expressed in dozens of paperbacks assuming that God fulfilled First Testament promises concerning the land in the events of the late nineteenth century and the period since the Second World War. This view appears in a more sophisticated form in Torrance's words:

The intense actualization, once again, of God's covenanted communion with the people of Israel within the land of promise, now called Israel, brings home to us in a new way not only the fact that the people and the land are woven indivisibly together in the fabric of Israel's vicarious mission and destiny among the peoples and nations of the earth, but also the fact that in this unitary spiritual and physical form Israel constitutes God's sign-post in the history of world-events, pointing ahead to a culmination in his saving interaction with mankind in space and time.... When God acts, he always takes us by surprise in breathtaking events. The startling reintegration of Jerusalem and Israel in our day, after nearly two millennia, is just one of these events.²⁸

²⁸ "The Divine Vocation and Destiny of Israel in World History," p. 104.

The implication is that the contemporary Israeli state is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.²⁹

One reason why this is too unequivocal a stance is that it ignores the moral aspect to the relationship between Israel and the land. When God promised the land to Abraham, the promise's fulfillment was delayed for "four generations" to avoid being unfair to its Canaanite inhabitants, because their waywardness did not in Abraham's day justify their being thrown out of the land (Gen 15:16). When Israel occupied Canaan, it did so as the agent of God's punishment of a people that can now be described as godless and immoral (Deut 9:4-5). Israel was also itself warned that possessing this land placed religious and moral demands upon it. If it failed to meet them, the same logic that had brought it into the land would eject it from it; and so, with the exile, it turned out. The withholding and the fulfilling of God's promise of land to Israel in First Testament times was tied up with how it and other nations involved with it stood before God and before standards of right and wrong. One may assume that this is still the case.

The point is inherent the Christian attitude to Israel that is hostile to Zionism, which appears white-hot in Lucas Grollenberg's *Palestine Comes First*,³⁰ and in more moderate form in Colin Chapman's *Whose Promised Land?*³¹ and in the British Council of Churches report *Towards Understanding the Arab/Israeli Conflict*.³² Grollenberg and Chapman both worked for some years in Arab areas, but they would want their work to be considered on theological grounds, not to be dismissed as mere expressions of a particular political stance. Both emphasize a different side to prophecy from the one dominant in the paperbacks just referred to: prophecy's "remorseless condemnation of religion, temple and state when they are used wrongly,"³³ its "passionate concern for justice" that calls us to a concern for every individual and community in the Middle East.³⁴ The land was to be the place where the just judgment of the God of Israel was embodied. It was not merely a possession, but a vocation and a moral destiny. "According to Deuteronomy no self-sufficient and self-glorifying possession of the land is possible.... According to the prophets [the] future relation between the people of Israel and [the land of] Palestine must serve the nations."³⁵

A related consideration is the Palestinian Arabs' historical, legal, and moral claim to the land of Canaan, which is as strong as that of the Israeli Jews; they have a theological claim too, as equally the sons of Abraham with Israel. They had been the majority inhabitants of Palestine for centuries: Jewish settlers did not return to an empty land, but to one with a native population of a million people. The Balfour Declaration said that "nothing should be done to prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing

²⁹ So, for instance, L. Lambert, *Till the Day Dawns* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1982); Pawson, *The Church, Britain, the World and Israel*.

³⁰ London: SCM, 1980.

³¹ Tring, UK: Lion, 1983.

³² *Towards Understanding the Arab/Israeli Conflict* (London: British Council of Churches, 1982).

³³ Grollenberg, *Palestine Comes First*, p. 139.

³⁴ Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* pp. 175 and 221.

³⁵ Weber, "The Promise of the Land," pp. 3 and 11.

non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” But actually the Jewish people have regained the land at the cost of displacing another people whose main crime was the misfortune of being in the wrong place. It is no more a solution for them to resettle in another Arab country than it would be for a displaced Englishman to settle in another European country or for the Jews to settle in Uganda (as Britain once proposed). The tragedy of Palestine is that two peoples make irreconcilable claims on the same strip of land. There is thus an ambiguity and a pathos about both the Jewish and the Palestinian destiny.³⁶ The Jewish return to the land raises moral questions that mean it cannot be unequivocally affirmed as the fulfillment of God’s purpose.

It also raises religious questions. We have noted that from a Christian perspective one can understand, or at least cope with, the Holocaust only in light of the cross of Christ. A Jew attempting to reflect on the Holocaust may observe, “At least the Holocaust was followed by (led to?) the founding of the State of Israel.” Thus “for us Jews Israel is our Jesus.”³⁷ Freedom to enjoy a happy and secure life in Palestine is a part of God’s commitment to the Jewish people, and its present freedom to live there comprises a partial fulfillment of that commitment. For deep and compelling reasons the state of Israel is thus a key religious focus for Jews. But it could thus become an idol, a substitute Messiah that becomes an anti-Messiah, especially in connection with the uncritical commitment to Israel often expected of U.S. Jews.³⁸ When Christians similarly commit themselves unreservedly and uncritically to Israel, then, they may be helping to make sure that an idol does not fall over.

There is another moving aspect to the significance of that promise to Abraham and its relationship to two peoples’ attachment to Palestine. We have suggested that God’s commitment to Abraham included the promise of land because land is intrinsic to peoplehood; the promise of land was part of the promise to make Abraham into a nation. But why was God bothering to make Abraham into a nation? God’s ultimate aim was that all the families of the earth should pray to be blessed as Abraham would be blessed (Gen 12:3 NEB). Genesis 1—11 has related how God’s blessing was originally given to but imperiled by humanity. God’s commitment to Abraham begins the story of how the blessing will be restored. God will so bless Abraham that his blessing will become the standard of blessing, modeling what God can do with one landless, childless person. God’s promise is thus given not only for Abraham and Sarah’s sake, but for the world’s. It is not to be spiritualized, but nor is it to be confined to Israel. It is to be universalized.

The restoration of Israel will thus be a restoration to being a means of God’s blessing the nations. The First Testament reckons that the Jewish people is of key significance to God’s purpose in history. Purely geographical consideration may make it difficult for Israel to avoid being the crossroads of history. It stands at the point of meeting (or point of conflict)

³⁶ See K. Cragg, *This Year in Jerusalem* (London: DLT, 1982), also *Towards Understanding the Arab/Israeli Conflict* and Grollenberg, *Palestine Comes First*.

³⁷ Quoted in Pawlikowski, “The Contemporary Jewish-Christian Theological Dialogue Agenda,” p. 599.

³⁸ See B. Krasner (with P. Chapman), “A Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *JECs* 9 (1972): 104-11 (see p. 109); cf. E. S. Shapiro, “American Jewry and the State of Israel,” *JECs* 14 (1977): 1-16.

of north and south, east and west. Its geographical location matches the theological significance given to the Jewish people by God's irrevocable choice of it to be the means of fulfilling a purpose in the world; perhaps God gave Israel this land because it would symbolize and facilitate its ministry to the world. That purpose declared in the First Testament (for instance, Gen 12:1-3 and Isa 2:1-4) is reaffirmed in the New Testament (see especially Rom 9 - 11). A consequence of mistakenly describing the church as "the new Israel" is to obscure God's continuing intention that the Jews should be the central nucleus of the worldwide people that recognizes Jesus as Lord. That worldwide people must include the Palestinians.

There might be various ways this could come about. While God's commitment to Israel does entail its enjoying the land of Canaan, it need not entail it having exclusive possession of it, certainly not to the *a priori* exclusion of fellow-descendants of Abraham, some of whom believe that Jesus is the Messiah. For centuries Jews who were Zionist in the sense that they wanted to live in their historic homeland, but not Zionist in the sense of claiming exclusive sovereign possession of the land, shared it reasonably happily with Arab Muslims and Christians.³⁹

Nor need God's promise entail Jews occupying the land as a state. During the first three millennia or so of its existence, only for a few hundred years was the people a sovereign state with a central government, like others, from Saul to the exile and then for a century after the deliverance from Antiochus Epiphanes.⁴⁰ At the beginning, Israel's ancestors had some freedom to enjoy life in the land of promise, though they had no independent statehood there. From Joshua to Samuel the descendants of Abraham enjoyed something like independent nationhood in the land of Israel, but without the kind of state government that other peoples had. Yahweh was their king; their earthly rulers had none of the permanent institutional authority possessed by other peoples' kings. That might look like God's ideal arrangement; but its result seemed to be that Israel found it increasingly difficult to live a viable national life, to live in politics, and a time came when Israel insisted on having the kind of government that other nations had. Although recognizing this as an act of rebellion against Yahweh's own kingship, Yahweh acceded to their plea, and got involved in the choice of the human king who would have a kingdom in Israel. Henceforth the kingship of Yahweh is exercised from the throne of David. Yahweh then takes on the idea that this should be so not only within Israel but in relation to the world as a whole: God's purpose was to realize rule over the world through the same Davidic king who ruled over Israel (see Ps 2). The story of Israel's experience of statehood, however, which lasted only those few centuries from Saul to the exile, is a discouraging one. By and large, Israel's governments by no means implement Yahweh's government. God's kingdom and Israel's kingdom look two quite different things, and Israel comes to realize that an ordinary earthly king will never lead Israel that way. Its hopes of a king who will do so come to attach themselves to a future king who will have to be a special gift from God, not merely the next young Davidide to accede to the throne in Jerusalem. The exile brings the

³⁹ Cf. H. H. Harcourt, "The Perils of Psychologizing Anti-Zionism," *JECs* 7 (1969): 634-640 (p. 637).

⁴⁰ On the contents of this paragraph, see further chapter 7 above.

end of the Davidic monarchy, and the postexilic period brings no constitutional revival of it. This experience encourages hopes of an anointed one, a Messiah, to come, but it also brings the emergence or reassertion of other attitudes to statehood and monarchy, to kingship and kingdom. Daniel talks about the kingdom of God being given by God to Nebuchadnezzar, though Daniel also sees the successive Middle-Eastern empires as no more worthy vice-regents of the God of Israel than David and his successors had been, so that in due course the kingship is given to the enigmatic human-like figure of Dan 7. Even if he in some way represents Israel as a whole; he is not simply a messianic figure. In the chapters of Isaiah that relate to the exile, the anointed king, the Messiah, through whom God's worldwide purpose is to be put into effect is the Persian Cyrus (Isa 45:1).

The Balfour Declaration spoke only of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and maintained a shrewd silence on the question of statehood. Theologically, statehood is not involved in the promise to Abraham, and whatever God's using Israel as a way of reaching and blessing the nations is to mean, it hardly requires Israel to become the political head of them as the world's superpower. Indeed, the First Testament story of Israel's experience of statehood that took it to exile is hardly an encouraging precedent for the revival of such statehood.

Unlike the question of land, the question of Israel's independent sovereign statehood is explicitly raised in the New Testament (though not clearly resolved), especially in Luke-Acts.⁴¹ It surfaces at the beginning of Luke's story, where Jesus' birth is heralded as the means of Israel being delivered both from the power of its enemies and from the power of its sins (e.g., Lk 2:68-79). It appears at the end of the Gospel, where Jesus speaks of Jerusalem being trodden down by the Gentiles until their times are fulfilled (Lk 21:24). The natural inference is that the Jews will then once again enjoy being able to live in Jerusalem, though Jesus does not explicitly say so. At the beginning of Acts, the apostles ask whether Jesus is now going to "restore the kingdom to Israel"; he rebukes them for asking about the time, but not for the idea itself (Acts 1:6-8). It is at this point that Luke-Acts leaves the ends untied. Jesus diverts the apostles' attention to the task of witnessing to the world, the focus of the rest of Acts. It is not quite clear whether or not the New Testament sees the restoration of Israel's sovereign independence as within the purpose of God. Nor is it clear how the sovereign independence of Israel relates to that rule of God that Jesus comes to proclaim and to inaugurate. If it is by its witness to the nations that (religiously) the kingdom is restored to Israel,⁴² one might have expected the point to be more explicit. More likely the restoration of Israel's sovereign freedom is assumed to be within God's purpose, but is set aside because it is to be left to God.

It seems to be an implication that the Jews should have freedom to enjoy the land of Palestine, but that (in principle or in theory) this freedom need not take the form of an Israeli state. To affirm that the land of Israel is still the destiny of the Jewish people is thus not in itself to imply a theological judgment about the present (or any other) state of Israel. Being able to enjoy the land and possessing independent sovereign statehood are

⁴¹ See E. Franklin, *Christ the Lord* (London: SPCK, 1975), pp. 13, 95-96, 102, 130.

⁴² Cf. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God*, pp. 51-53, 81-82.

separable questions; for most of history they have been. A commitment to and a longing for Zion as an essential symbol of God's covenant with Israel and Israel's relationship with God need not imply a commitment to Israel's possessing this land as a nation-state.

There is a famous controversy about how to define a Jew, but perhaps we can say about the Jews corporately that they are a people, with an ethnic awareness, and a common sense of history and tradition. They are not a religious community; in this connection, "Jews" is a word more like "Hispanics" or "Arabs" than a word like "Christians" or "Muslims." A person does not have to believe anything or to take on any particular practices in order to count as a Jew, or to live in Israel. The average Israeli is hardly more likely to have religious convictions or to attend religious services than the average Briton. In the dispersion, where most Jews live, in the long run the pressure of assimilation may have a more devastating effect on the Jewish community than the Holocaust did. There are naturally differences of opinion over whether this situation is made worse or better by the fact that large numbers of Jews have come to believe in Jesus over the past fifteen years, mostly in the U.S.A.

4 Israel's Destiny Is Secure, but its Present is Dependent on its Decisions

The return of Jews of Palestine over the last hundred years, which made the foundation of the state of Israel possible, is part of the story of the development of the modern world, and it can only be understood when it is seen as part of that story. Many of the instincts that led to it and the factors that made it possible are identical to or parallel to ones that lay behind the formation of the other European, Asian, and African states, most of which did not exist a century ago in the form that we know them. That Israel as a nation had a right to exist parallel to the right of other nations had was first argued by Rabbi Liva ben Bezalel in the sixteenth century.⁴³ But it has its state at the cost of most Palestinian Arabs losing their homeland. It is not surprising that they feel a sense of grief and anger at the suffering that Zionism has brought to Palestine. This suffering has taken Arabs and Jews from coexistence to a history of mutual terrorist attacks and wars that independent parties have condemned.

Zionism, that love for Palestine that led to Jews wanting to return there at the end of the last century, was based on high ideals. It was concerned for justice, for equality, for the development of the land (often neglected) and for a right use of it. Israel has been immensely courageous in caring for Jewish people all over the world. The foundation of the state reflected a determination on the part of its founders that Jews should possess somewhere where they had as much national security and were in as much control of their destiny as any other people. In other words, Israel wanted to be a state like any other. And it has the profound political, social, and economic problems that many states have. Becoming a state like others risks a collective assimilation to the ways of the Gentiles as dangerous as the

⁴³ So Martin Buber, *On Zion: The History of An Idea* (reprinted Edinburgh: Clark, 1985), pp. 77-89.

individual assimilation of the dispersion.⁴⁴

The Torah and the Prophets expect that God's morality and justice should be practiced in the world. They are a challenge to Israelis and Palestinians, to Jews and Arabs elsewhere, as well as to powers such as the U.S.A. and Britain. Torah and Prophets confront Israel about its moral life, reassert the moral and just nature of its God, and reassert God's righteous demands. When Jesus speaks of the fulfillment of the Torah and the Prophets (Matt 5:17-20), it would be reasonable to reckon that he reckons to obey and further the purpose of the commands of God in the Torah and the Prophets as well as confirm and bring into reality the promises of God. In a parallel way, for modern Israel to be the fulfillment of biblical prophecy would involve its embodying the moral concerns of prophecy.

In certain ways it has sought to do so. There was a moral earnestness about the pioneers of the Zionist movement that reflected the righteous earnestness of the prophets. But many Jews inside and outside Israel are now declaring sadly that that day is over. Perhaps the gentile/Christian world is too guilty for the way it has treated the Jewish people in the past, especially in the twentieth century, to have the moral right to express an opinion or a judgment on that question. But the implication of these Jewish opinions is that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians has taken modern Israel several steps further away from being the fulfillment of this central message of biblical prophecy.

The moral aspect to prophecy also means that Israel's present possession of the land of Palestine is not bound to be a permanency; its leaving the land again is not theologically inconceivable. Despite God's gift of the land to Abraham's descendants, they lost substantial possession of it in 721, in 587, in the Second Temple period, and in AD 135, and on various other occasions (to judge from the Psalms). David Pawson speaks of the threat it would be to his faith if Israel lost the land again.⁴⁵ The argument of Rom 9 - 11 does suggest that if the Jewish people ceased to exist, this would be a severe threat to one's faith. But to anchor that faith to the people's possession of the land is to give it false security. The people who lost the land in biblical times possessed promises that they would never lose the land, but they did lose it because they did not give the God of the promise the allegiance that the promise relationship demanded. The final security of the Jewish people and its freedom to live securely in the land is sure; but whether any individual generation enjoys God's blessing and enjoys possession of the land depends on its relationship to God. There is no reason to make the present generation of the Jewish people an exception.

This is not to imply that if Israel were to lose the land, it must be because of its sin. Arguments such as these have been used to enable Christians to shrug their shoulders over the Holocaust. The working of God's moral purpose in the world is commonly too ambiguous for one to be able to make clear judgments of that kind. If Israel were to lose the land, this might, like the Holocaust, reflect gentile indifference rather than Jewish sin. My point is that one cannot simply assume that Israel will continue to possess the land, as if God's commitment regarding the land had no

⁴⁴ D. Marmur, *Beyond Survival: Reflections on the Future of Judaism* (London: DLT, 1982), pp. 170-71.

⁴⁵ *The Church, Britain, the World and Israel*.

religious and moral implications. God's promises always make such demands upon us, and how we respond to them makes a difference to whether and how they are fulfilled.

God's commitment to the Jewish people also does not mean that the friends of Israel are committed to supporting its every action in an uncritical way. After various countries yielded to pressure to move their embassies from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, a group of mainly expatriate Christians in Israel opened an "International Christian Embassy" in Jerusalem "to comfort Zion and to render practical service to modern-day Israel." They believe that the calling of Christians is to comfort and support Israel, not to attempt to criticize or evangelize her.

Perhaps they chose the wrong moment to make an imaginative move, for unfortunately the Embassy's best publicized act was its unequivocal statements of support for Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Comfort is sometimes God's word to the people, but at other times God's word is more judgmental. It may not be our business to criticize Israel, but the right alternative is not uncritical support, lest we are offering comfort at a time when it needs confrontation, even if not from us. Likewise, the forswearing of Christian witness to Jesus in relation to Israel or the Jewish people seems a doubtfully loving act, even if more foreign missionaries is the last thing the Israeli state or the Israeli church needs.

It is a plausible view that the return of many Jews to the land in our day is part of God's fulfilling a purpose for the world, for the Jews, and for the Church. As long as the Jews exist as a people, it is natural for their focus to be there, and the fact that the salvation story was played out there also makes this natural. Thus the fact that this return has happened is, for Christians, reason for praise and for hope. At the same time, an invariable accompaniment of our thinking about the Jews has to be penitence before our God for the history of crusades, inquisition, pogroms, and Holocaust over the centuries; and not least for the toll for the Jewish people and for other Middle-Eastern peoples of twentieth century political decisions (or lack of decisions) taken by Britain and, more recently, by the U.S.A. If it is hardly the case that God could have purposed to give Palestine to the modern Jews in a way that simply overrode the rights of Palestinian Arabs, then in their loss (even though it may have been in part caused and then aggravated by mistaken policies on their part) Christians should be weeping and grieving with them - many of them being our brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is nice but sad to romance about forms fulfillment of Yahweh's promise might have taken. There was a time in the first half of the twentieth century when the Balfour Declaration's schizophrenic vision of a Jewish national home that did not trample on Palestinian rights might have been fulfilled, a time when Palestine might have developed into a Jewish-Arab independent state. But practical politics has to accept the fact that the State of Israel does exist. There was a time more recently when one might have dreamed of an internationalized Jerusalem, or of Jerusalem as a Jewish-Arab condominium, but the events just before and just after 2000 make that also now difficult to imagine, though some Palestinian thinkers contemplate abandoning the "two-state solution" and campaigning for a single, bi-national state.

The church is called to stand with both Israelis and Palestinians in prayer, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, seeking to share and to bring before God their suffering, their fear, their insecurity, their needs, and their temptations. Each of the longer prophetic books addresses the experience of exile and thus concerns itself with how people cope with the suffering it brings. Jeremiah seeks to prepare people for exile and speaks of his own suffering in that connection, Ezekiel does the same even while experiencing the anticipatory 597 exile, and Isa 40 – 55 takes it as its background as it seeks to rebuild a demoralized people with news of a God who reigns but whose purpose finds fulfillment through the suffering of the servant of Isa 53.

One cannot blame Jews for declining to carry on accepting the role of the suffering servant in exile, which the gentile/Christian world has imposed on them. But the role of the suffering servant, fulfilled by Jesus yet not exhausted by him, keeps haunting the story of the Middle-Eastern peoples and the church. Until we (or they) have discovered its positive implications for them (and us) we will not have plumbed the depths of what it means for prophecy to be fulfilled there. .

“What does it mean, Lord, when now two people pray, ‘next year in Jerusalem!’?” asks Barbara Krasner.⁴⁶ We pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps 122:6), aware that this is a prayer for peace for all those who love Jerusalem, including both Jew and Arab, and that with this prayer more than most I have to expect (and rejoice) that the manner of its answering will probably be quite different from what any of us who pray it quite envisage.

⁴⁶ B. Krasner with M. Roache, “Relationship Dynamics and Our View of the Middle East,” *JECs* 12 (1975): 257-60 (p. 260). Compare Kenneth Cragg’s portrait of the tragedy of both Jews and Palestinians in *This Year in Jerusalem* (London: DLT, 1982).